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+ Croatian experiences in Mentoring

Challenges and opportunities when setting
up with Mentoring system

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"In my early days as a probation officer, I was given a stack of case files and assigned a mentor, but she was out sick for the first few weeks. I felt completely lost, making decisions I wasn't sure were right and constantly second-guessing myself. When my mentor finally returned, it felt like a weight had been lifted."

01

Importance of Onboarding





Why is onboarding important?



Complex Job

Probation officers work with complex, high-risk clients, make decisions with legal and safety implications, and must balance support and control.

Necessary

Quality onboarding is necessary for both the professional and personal safety of officers, as well as for the overall quality of the system.





Risk of poor onboarding

- **Costs**
 - loss of productivity and work quality
 - decreased motivation
 - risk of burnout
 - high turnover rates



What makes a good onboarding system?





Training

- formal education
- predetermined duration and content
- usually in groups
- focuses on transferring knowledge about laws, procedures and tools that officers need

Mentoring

- a longer-term one-on-one relationship
- experienced officer helps a new colleague apply acquired knowledge and develop professional confidence
- it happens in real situations

Coaching

- the coach is not necessarily an expert in probation
- the coach helps the officer find their own answers and improve their skills
- more often used for experienced officers seeking professional growth





Why is mentoring crucial in probation?

Complexity of the Job

Clients may be manipulative, aggressive, or resistant to change.

Officer Safety

Recognizing risky situations and learning professional boundaries.

Learning through experience

Developing confidence and expertise through practical examples and experienced support.



02

Mentoring in Croatian Probation



Understanding the Scope and Size...

Central Office 14 Regional Offices

Biggest office – 17 officers

Smallest office – 3 officers

Most of the offices have the average of 5-6 officers.

Less than 100 people in the entire Croatian probation.

A maximum of 5 people are hired annually across the entire Croatian probation system.



Why focus on Mentoring?

01 Recruitment

Sporadic employment, no major recruitment competitions.

New officers do not have the structure of large onboarding programs.

02 Entry Qualifications

Strong theoretical knowledge but less practical experience.





Onboarding in Croatian Probation



Basic Training

Basic training for all new hires (one week) - formal introduction to the system and work methods.



Mentoring

Mentoring from day one - individualized knowledge and experience transfer, traditional one-on-one mentoring.



Continuous Development

Specific education programs throughout professional development.



01 Flexible and Personalized Approach

02 Goal-Oriented

03 Methods

04 Mentor Selection

05 No training or Compensation



03

Benefits and Challenges





Benefits - Faster Adaptation

01 Guidance through real situations

Training knowledge is immediately linked to real cases.

02 Individualization

Adaptation to individual learning styles of the mentee.

03 Mentor-mentee chemistry

Plays a crucial role in strengthening workplace dynamics and team cohesion.



"A mentor is not just a source of information – they are the first line of defense against burnout and uncertainty."

Benefits - Professional Security & Resilience

Reduced Stress

New officers know they have someone to rely on.

Learning Safety

Learning about recognizing manipulation, aggression and other challenges through the mentor's experience.



CORE VALUES



Benefits - Organizational Impact

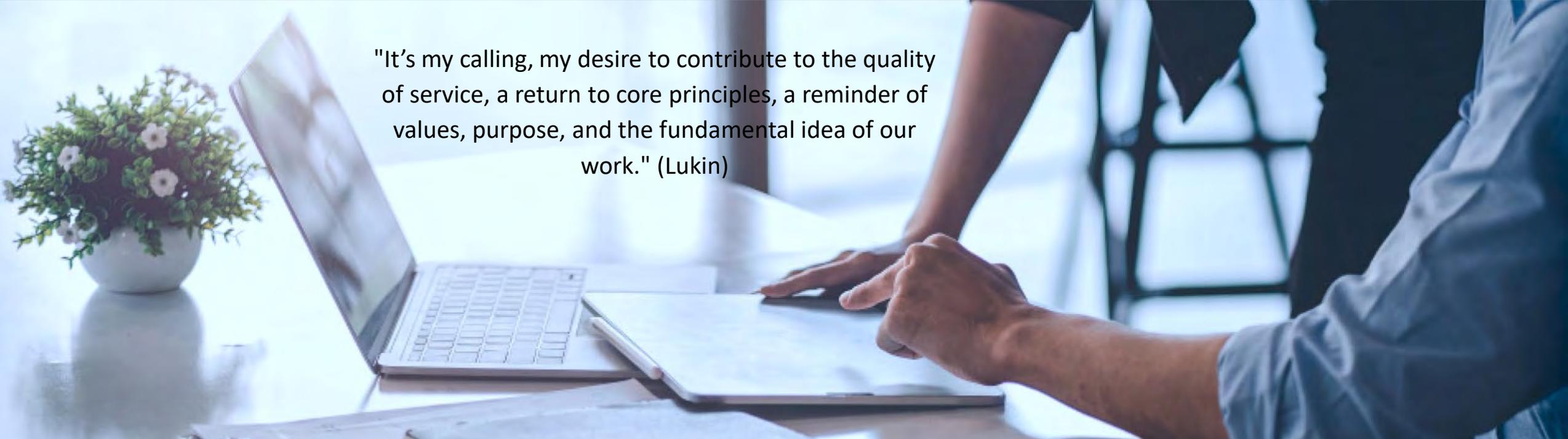
Retention

Well-onboarded officers become more competent and loyal - a strong start reduces turnover.

Ethics Transfer

Mentors influence work ethics - they transfer not just knowledge, but the core values of probation work.



A photograph of a person's hands pointing at a tablet on a desk. A laptop is open to the left, and a vase with white flowers is in the foreground. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office setting.

"It's my calling, my desire to contribute to the quality of service, a return to core principles, a reminder of values, purpose, and the fundamental idea of our work." (Lukin)

Benefits - Mentor Development

- Strengthening their leadership skills
- Opportunity to reflect on their own work and refresh their knowledge
- Motivational Factor: mentoring as a reward



Challenges - Mentor Workload

Mentoring requires extra time and effort

Increased Responsibilities, Time Commitment, Emotional Investment

In smaller offices, the same person always takes on the mentoring role

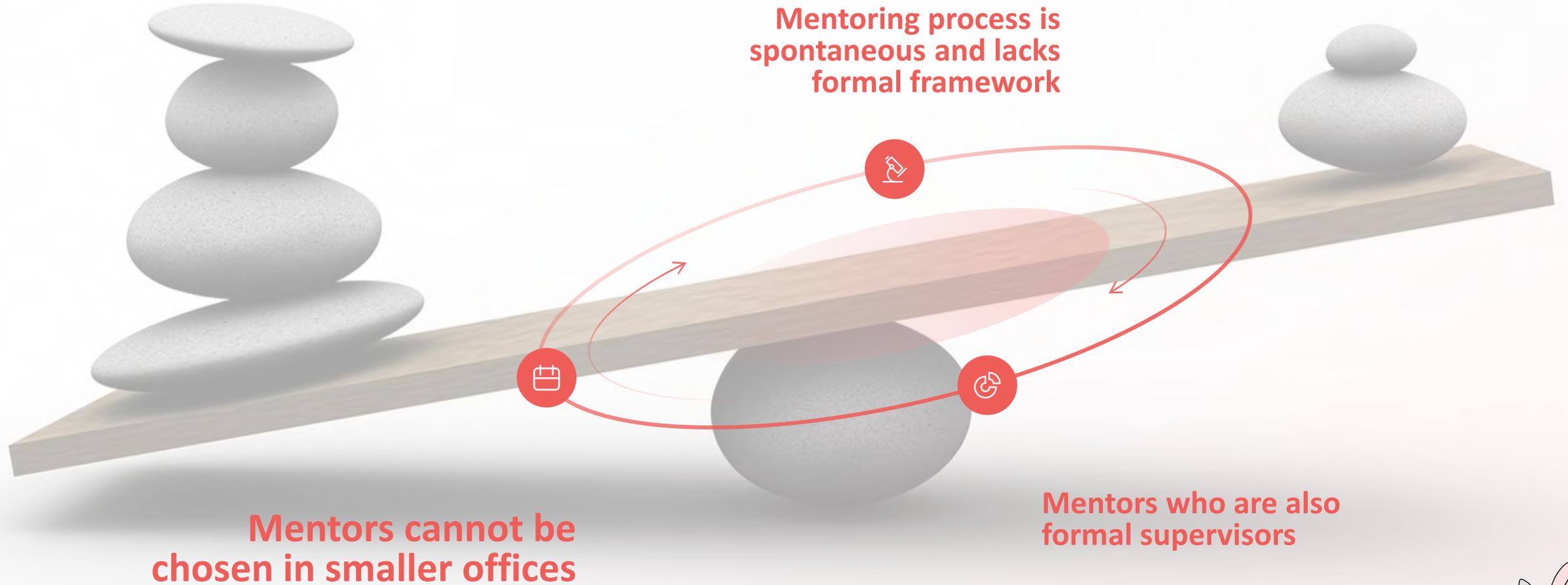
Risk of fatigue and dissatisfaction.



Challenges - Mentoring



Quality Can Vary



Challenges -Lack of Training for Mentors

Being a good mentor is different from being a good probation officer

- requires empathy
- skilled communicators
- ongoing training needed



04

How Can We Improve?



More Structure

Clear Framework

Develop a structured mentoring program with defined goals, phases, and expectations.



Support for Mentors



Training

Training for mentors - how to set goals, give feedback, and build trust.

Recognition

Formal acknowledgment, additional training opportunities, and possibly financial incentives?

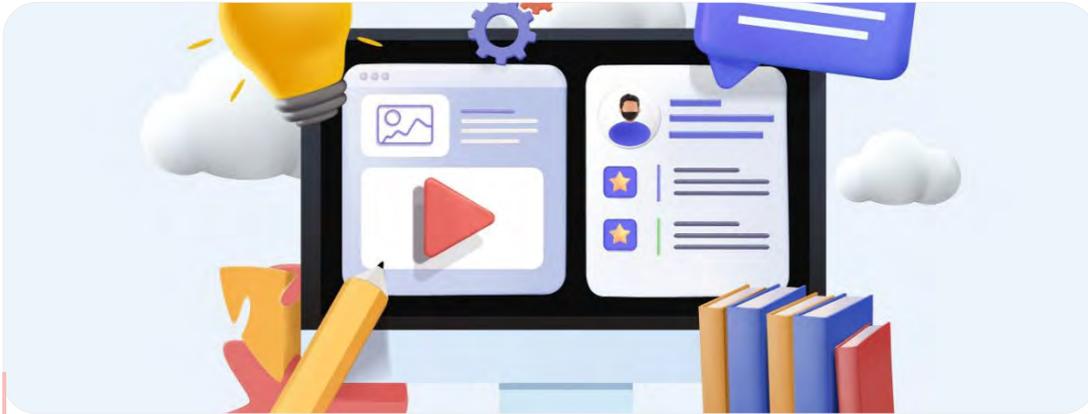
Mentor Network

A platform for exchanging best practices.



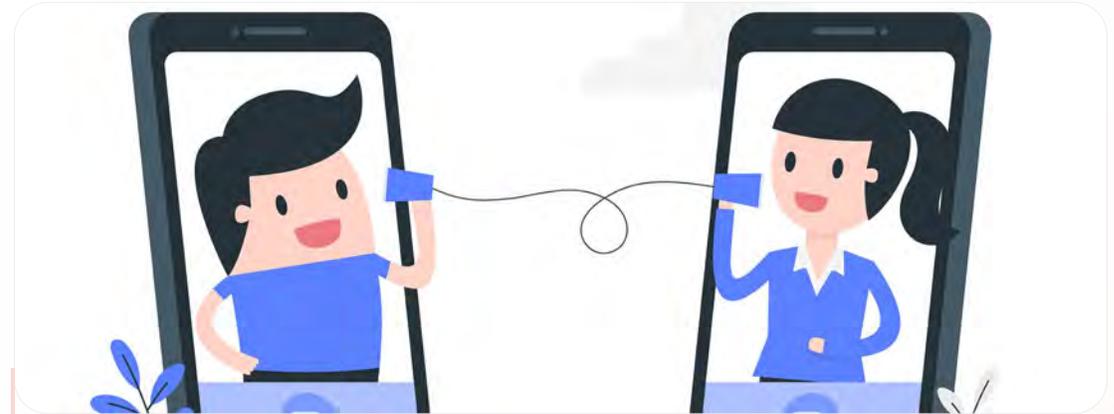


Using Technology to Improve Mentorship



Online Resources

Online resources and e-mentoring - a platform with materials, guidelines, and best practices.



Virtual Supervision

Virtual supervision - mentoring across offices via video calls.





Introduction of evaluation

Ensuring Quality

Adapting Content

Motivating Continuous Learning

Identifying Weaknesses



05

Conclusion



⋮ Key Messages

01 Investment

Good onboarding is not a cost - it's an investment.

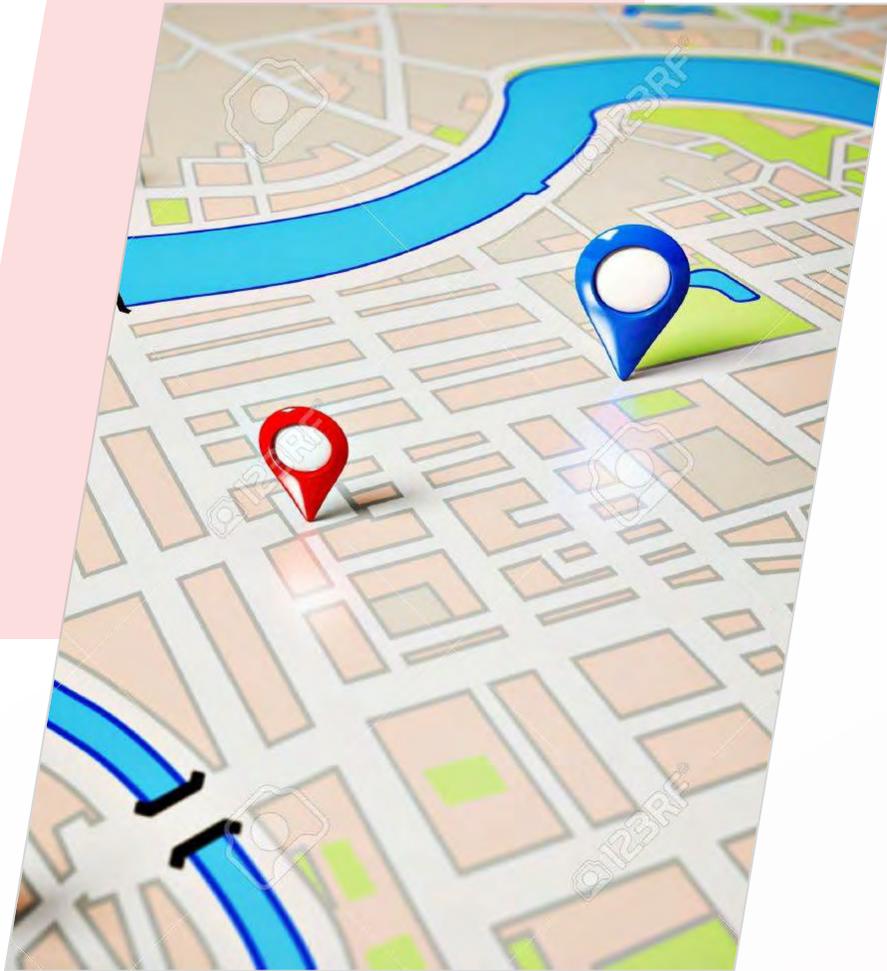
02 Mentoring is Key

New officers don't just learn the rules; they acquire the "unwritten knowledge" that makes the difference between an average and an excellent officer.

03 Flexibility is Crucial

Mentoring approaches should be adapted to fit the unique context, challenges, and needs of each probation system.





Mentors are like GPS - they don't drive for you, but they help you avoid getting lost.





Thank You

